

Statement by Mohammad Reza Salamat (Islamic Republic of Iran), on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, at the Third Session of the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or their Representatives on International Environmental Governance

Algiers, 9 September 2001

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Mr. President, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honor and a distinct pleasure for me to address, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, such a distinguished audience at a very august gathering.

First and foremost, allow me Mr. President to register our most sincere gratitude to the People and Government of Algeria for the excellent arrangements they have made for organizing this important meeting, and for the very warm hospitality they have extended to us all since our arrival in this beautiful city. In particular, I wish to appreciate Mr. Sharif Rahmani, the distinguished Minister of Environment of Algeria, for the sterling job he did for preparations of this meeting. Our gathering here indeed signifies the high importance the developing countries attach to environmental issues in general and to the IEG process in particular.

We were deeply impressed by the brilliant opening statement made by the distinguished President of Algeria. His statement was indeed enlightening as well as reflective of the state of affairs that frame our discussions on IEG. We concur with His Excellency that IEG should address inequalities within the context of sustainable development.

I would also like to seize the opportunity to express our warmest felicitations to Minister David Anderson, the distinguished President of the UNEP Governing Council and the President of the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or their Representatives, as well as to Dr. Klaus Topfer and his capable colleagues within UNEP for their commendable efforts to lead the IEG process in a transparent and participatory manner, and, as in the words of Dr. Topfer, in a professional fashion.

The process of International Environmental Governance-IEG- has made a good progress thus far and has already entered a critical stage where substantive debate is warranted. I hardly need to reiterate, Mr. President, the genuine determination and resolve of the Group of 77 and China for a continued proactive and constructive engagement and participation in the on-going intergovernmental discussions on IEG. We have come to Algiers with the intention of getting involved in and being part of the global debate on IEG, substantive as it is intended to be in this session. We are confident that our deliberations here could help provide some building blocks for our future discussion on IEG.

Another proof of the keen interest of the developing countries in the IEG process is a rather comprehensive and analytical work that was undertaken and completed by the South just prior to this Third meeting of IEG. Upon the initiative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the Chairman of G-77 and China, two research institutions in the South- that is the South Centre and the Third World Network- were requested to undertake an analytical study on the IEG issues from a perspective of developing countries. We are pleased to inform this august gathering that the results of these studies are available at this meeting. We appreciate them both very much for the very useful and interesting ideas and suggestions they have produced. We are confident

that the results of these two studies would prove useful not only for G-77 negotiators, but also for the entire process. We invite our negotiating partners from the North to examine their content, which might hopefully be instrumental in advancing the understanding of our mutual views and ideas.

Mr. President,

Although we note with satisfaction the growing common understanding on some of the underlying premises as a basis for the review and strengthening of International Environmental Governance, I wish to highlight a number of principles, concepts and ideas which, in the eyes of the developing countries, should form the cornerstone of the debate on IEG, as follows:

1. From our perspective, the Environment-Development link, as manifested in the concept and paradigm of “Sustainable Development” and which is the most important universally supported achievement of the Rio Conference and indeed the centerpiece of this historic event, should continue to remain the fundamental guiding principle of our work on IEG. To put it in a nutshell, environment should not, and in fact cannot, be separated from development. The two have to be dealt with together. This has clear policy and political implications.
2. Environmental issues must be viewed through the lens of Sustainable Development. Therefore, sustainable development aspects should be reinforced within the deliberations and decisions of all components of IEG, including the UNEP Governing Council/ GMEF and MEAs.
3. A deeper insight into the definition of IEG proves that UNEP is one of the components of IEG Architecture. Hence, the governance of other bodies of the UN system such as CSD, UNDP, UNCTAD, FAO, GEF, etc. and of MEAs as well as the international organizations outside of the UN system which form other components of IEG, also require review within the context of review process of the WSSD.
4. The “context” for IEG should be “Sustainable Development”. This would ensure the integration of the three interdependent pillars of environmental protection, economic growth and social development in a balanced manner.
5. IEG should be strengthened only simultaneously and proportionately with the other two pillars of sustainable development, notably economic and social development being reviewed and strengthened.
6. The International Sustainable Development Governance is the appropriate context within which the “economic and social” dimensions of sustainable development should be addressed, particularly in regards to trade, finance and economic issues. A strengthened International Sustainable Development Governance could better interact with multilateral trading system, notably the WTO, and international financial institutions, like GEF, World Bank, etc., with a view to achieving sustainable development. To that end, ways and means should be explored to help make multilateral trading system and international financial institutions more democratic, transparent and participatory.
7. The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is the main forum for High-Level Policy debate on “Sustainable Development”.
8. We note with satisfaction and great interest that the International Sustainable Development Governance would be reviewed in the context of the Prep-Com of the WSSD, pursuant to GA Resolution A/55/199, with a view to addressing ways of strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development and evaluating and defining the role and programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development.
9. The Decision taken at the Prep-Com-1 of the WSSD, inviting all relevant intergovernmental processes, including the IEG process, to provide their progress reports to the second session of Prep-Com and the final

results to Prep-Com-3 has put these processes on the right track. The full compliance with this decision of Prep-Com-1 is a requisite for a universally acceptable and politically balanced outcome of the IEG process.

10. IEG should not be dealt with in abstract and as a purely “institutional” matter. To put it more bluntly, the reasons for the current weaknesses of IEG are not necessarily “institutional/organizational”, but rather, a lack of political will, particularly on the part of the developed countries to comply with their commitments undertaken at Rio and under MEAs.

11. The ultimate objective of all MEAs adopted at Rio and since Rio is to achieve sustainable development. Therefore, it should be ensured that a strengthened IEG would not compromise the “development” dimension of the MEAs. Thus, we need to reinforce the “sustainable development” aspects in the deliberations and decisions of MEAs.

12. A strengthened IEG should ensure that the principle of “Common but Differentiated Responsibilities”- Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration- is operationalized more effectively in the work of the UNEP, MEAs, and other components of IEG, in light of the “environmental debt” of the industrialized countries. To put it in more concrete terms, a strengthened IEG should ensure that developed countries would take the lead in undertaking the financial burden arising from increasing the funding basis of UNEP, as well and more importantly in supporting the “Means of Implementation” for developing countries, notably through the transfer of technology, financial resources and capacity building. In our view, UNEP’s increased role in capacity building and technology transfer in a strengthened IEG deserves favorable consideration. We would like to propose that an intergovernmental expert body on the transfer of environmentally sound technology under UNEP be established. This could ensure a wider as well as meaningful participation by the developing countries in a strengthened IEG.

13. The financial basis of UNEP could be increased in order to make it predictable, stable and adequate. However, this should be designed in a way that would not impose further burden on developing countries.

14. A distinction between the administrative costs” and the “operational costs” of UNEP activities should be made. For the “administrative costs”, the implementation of the GA Resolution A/53/242 is a good basis upon which the Secretary General of the UN could be requested to provide additional regular budget resources for UNEP. While, for the “operational costs”, the “principles of “Common But Differentiated Responsibilities” and “Polluters-pay” should apply. Therefore, developed countries should undertake to provide new and additional financial resources for the operational costs. In doing so, modalities for burden-sharing among developed countries to provide resources for the “Environment Fund” of UNEP should be developed.

15. It is our firm conviction that strengthening IEG does not require creating a new institution. Rather, an effective use of the existing institutions would better ensure an optimal utilization of already limited resources available globally. Furthermore, a proliferation of coordinating bodies would be counterproductive.

16. UNEP’s coordinating role among MEAs for enhancing coordination and synergies should be viewed within the framework of GA Resolution A/53/242.

17. The option of “Clustering” MEAs, either on a functional or programmatic and issue basis has been put forward by some of our developed partners. The Group of 77 and China is of the view that a further study of feasibility and possible ways of clustering MEAs is needed. Furthermore, it is necessary as well as useful to seek the views of the respective autonomous decision-making bodies of MEAs before deciding on clustering. Only a positive response from MEAs could enable us to consider a “Pilot Clustering” of one group of interrelated MEAs on an issue-based approach. Such Pilot Clustering could be envisaged for one of the following three groups of MEAs: Chemicals Conventions (notably Basel, PIC and POPs Conventions);

Biodiversity-related Conventions (notably CBD, CMS, CITES and Ramsar Conventions); and Regional Seas Conventions.

18. Co-location of MEAs Secretariats is politically difficult and practically unlikely to result in removing overlaps and enhancing synergies among such agreements.
19. Co-location of interrelated and relevant environmental meetings/MEAs COPs could be examined after the “Pilot Clustering” that I alluded to above, taking into account their distinct programmes of work, their different membership and the practicality as well as usefulness of doing so.
20. EMG’s potential should be used more effectively and transparently for strengthening IEG, within the framework of GA Resolution A/53/242. Furthermore, the EMG’s relationship with Sustainable Development Inter-Agency task Force should be rationalized and better defined.
21. UNEP’s role in GEF could be enhanced, in particular through strengthening the role of STAP. UNEP’s enhanced role within GEF should ensure to bring “domestic environmental benefits” to the GEF-funded projects by applying the principle of “incremental cost” in a more flexible manner. It is our view that this proposal would increase the sense of ownership in developing countries for GEF-financed projects, which in turn requires a reform of the current GEF policies. Nevertheless, the views of GEF in this regard should be sought by the IEG process.
22. UNEP at the Nairobi Headquarters as well as the Habitat and UNON should be strengthened, by utilizing these Headquarters more increasingly.
23. UNEP’s increased relationship with the operational bodies of the UN system such as UNDP, particularly in the field of capacity building and technical assistance, deserves consideration.
24. Pursuant to GA Resolution A/53/242, UNEP should not become involved in conflict identification, prevention or resolution. Therefore, the idea of establishing a “Dispute Settlement Mechanism” for environmental issues or an “Environmental Court”, or an “Environmental Ombudsman” is neither practical nor desirable.
25. The idea of enhancing the role and authority of GMEF, so as to enable it to act as the “umbrella environmental policy forum” seems, for practical reasons if for nothing else, too ambitious at this stage. Only a thorough analysis of the functioning of the GMEF could enable us to consider the feasibility of this option. The experience thus far gained from the work of the GMEF is far from adequate to make this idea attractive for the time being.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, we presume it would be very useful if the UNEP secretariat prepares a chart for our consideration, illustrating all options put forward so far for strengthening of IEG with their legal and financial implications.

I would like to express the preparedness of G-77 and China for cooperating closely with you to help make this meeting a success. We are also ready and willing for holding a constructive dialogue with our negotiating partners from the North. We believe such exchange of views, if done with genuine resolve and in good faith, could help advance our mutual understanding of the views, ideas and suggestions before us, and thus would better ensure to bring us to a common denominator on IEG.

I wish to indicate that the G-77 and China will continue its internal deliberations during today and tomorrow, as the discussions on IEG evolve and advance.

Thank you Mr. President.

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